

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8776
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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINS, UR, US, CSCE, OTRA

SUBJECT: EMBASSY TRAVEL - FEBRUARY 1978

REF: (A) MOSCOW 3167, (B) MOSCOW 3125, (C) MOSCOW 2794,
(D) MOSCOW 2235, (E) STATE 55749

SUMMARY: FEBRUARY WAS ROCKY MONTH FOR EMBASSY TRAVEL PROGRAM, AS MFA PROVED UNWILLING TO HONOR LETTER OF ITS JANUARY NOTE AND REFUSED ALL OUR REQUESTS FOR EMBOFF TRAVEL TO NEWLY-OPENED AREAS OUTSIDE THE MOSCOW OBLAST. IN ALL, THERE WERE SEVEN CASES IN WHICH EMBASSY TRIPS WERE EITHER REFUSED OR ALTERED, AND IN EVERY CASE SAVE ONE AREAS DENIED WERE REGIONS RARELY OR NEVER VISITED BY EMBOFFS AND THEREFORE OF MORE THAN USUAL SUBSTANTIVE REPORTING VALUE. EMBASSY URGES STRONG AND IMMEDIATE RETALIATION. END SUMMARY.

1. EMBASSY TRAVEL STATISTICS FOR JANUARY ARE AS FOLLOWS:

REQUESTS: 27

DESTINATIONS: 51

TRAVELERS: 47

SELF-CANCELLED: 2

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REFUSED/ALTERED: 7

EXCEPTIONS GRANTED: 4

2. ON FEBRUARY 14 MFA INFORMED EMBASSY THAT REQUEST FOR FEBRUARY 15-18 VISIT TO MAGNITOGORSK BY POL COUNSELOR AND A BRITISH FIRST SECRETARY WAS REFUSED "FOR REASONS OF A TEMPORARY NATURE" (ROTN). AT SAME TIME, MFA ALSO TURNED DOWN PROPOSED TRIP BY EMBOFFS SONTAG AND BYRNES

TO KARAGANDA FEBRUARY 17-20, GIVING SAME REASON (REF D).

3. ON FEBRUARY 17 MFA PROTOCOL REQUIRED EMBASSY SECRETARIES TOWNSEND AND SEANGER TO CHANGE THEIR MODE OF TRAVEL FOR TRIP THROUGH CENTRAL ASIA FEBRUARY 18-20. ORIGINALLY, TOWNSEND AND SEANGER INTENDED TO TRAVEL BY TRAIN ASHKHABAD-CHARDZOU-BUKHARA, BUT WERE REQUIRED BY MFA TO GO BY PLANE (OPERATING UNDER THE NEW RULES LAID DOWN IN THE 1978 NOTE). AS RESULT, CHARDZOU HAD TO BE DROPPED FROM ITINERARY, SINCE NO AIR RESERVATIONS WERE OBTAINABLE ON SUCH LATE NOTICE.

4. ON FEBRUARY 19 POL COUNS BROWN WAS UNABLE TO TRAVEL TO YEREVAN BECAUSE HIS TICKET WAS RESOLD TO ANOTHER PASSENGER. INTOURIST RESERVES THE RIGHT TO RESELL TICKETS OF PASSENGERS WHO FAIL TO CHECK IN WITHIN 30 MINUTES OF TAKEOFF, AND BROWN'S TICKET WAS APPARENTLY RESOLD ONLY A MINUTE OR TWO BEFORE HE ARRIVED AT INTOURIST CHECK-IN COUNTER 25 MINUTES BEFORE FLIGHT TIME. BROWN QUESTIONED VALIDITY OF THIS PRACTICE WHEN DIPLOMATS ARE INVOLVED, BUT RECEIVED NO SATISFACTORY REPLY. LATER, AFTER A MEETING AT MFA ON ANOTHER SUBJECT, SOVIET NOTETAKER VOLUNTEERED SPECULATION THAT SINCE YEREVAN WAS A "BORDER CITY" PRE-DEPARTURE SECURITY PRECAUTIONS WERE TIGHTER, AND HE SUGGESTED THAT IF BROWN HAD BEEN GOING TO AN INTERIOR CITY HE PROBABLY WOULD HAVE BEEN ABLE TO BOARD THE PLANE EVEN THOUGH HE WAS LATE. WE VIEW THIS "EXPLANATION" AS FANCIFUL, BUT ARE ALTERING OUR INSTRUCTIONS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TIONS FOR TRAVELLERS TO THESE AREAS ACCORDINGLY.

5. MFA PROTOCOL OFFICER VACHNADZE INFORMED TRAVEL OFFICER AFTERNOON OF FEB. 27 THAT REQUEST FOR MARCH 5-7 VISIT TO UST-KUT AND MARCH 8-10 VISIT TO NIZHNEANGARSK BY EMBOFFS SONTAG AND BYRNES WAS REFUSED FOR ROTN (REF B). SONTAG AND BYRNES ALSO ENCOUNTERED PROBLEMS WITH GAI IN NEWLY-OPENED CITY OF MOZHAISK (REF D).

6. ON FEB. 28 VACHNADZE INFORMED TRAVEL OFFICER THAT REQUEST FOR MARCH 5-7 VISIT TO BOBRUISK BY PPO TUA WAS REFUSED FOR ROTN. BOBRUISK HAS BEEN AN OPEN CITY SINCE 1966, AND EXACT REASONS FOR REFUSAL REMAIN A MYSTERY.

7. ON FEB. 28 VACHNADZE ALSO INFORMED TRAVEL OFFICER THAT REQUEST FOR MARCH 2-7 VISITS TO CHITA, CHUL'MAN AND NERUNGRIY BY EMBOFFS TORRE AND STARBIRD WAS DENIED. IN CHITA CASE, CLOSED AREA EXCEPTION REQUEST WAS REFUSED. CHUL'MAN AND NERUNGRIY WERE REFUSED FOR ROTN. TORRE AND STARBIRD TRIP ALSO INCLUDED IRKUTSK, HOWEVER SINCE IRKUTSK WAS MERELY JUMPING OFF POINT FOR THREE AREAS REFUSED, ENTIRE TRIP WAS CANCELLED. WE VIEW NERUNGRIY TURNED DOWN AS DEMONSTRABLY DISCRIMINATORY SINCE AUSTRALIAN COMMERCIAL AND POLITICAL COUNSELORS WERE PERMITTED TO GO THERE MAY 9-20, 1977. MOREOVER, EQUIPMENT FROM TWO

AMERICAN FIRMS IS IN USE THERE, BOTH HAVE AMERICAN
CITIZENS ON SITE FULL TIME, ONE FIRM HAS BEEN URGING
US TO VISIT FOR SEVERAL MONTHS, AND COAL MINISTRY HAD
FACILITATED OUR COMMUNICATIONS ABOUT THE TRIP. AUSTRALIAN
EMBOFF MAY DID SAY THAT EARLIER AUSTRALIAN REQUESTS FOR
NERUNGRIY HAD ALL BEEN TURNED DOWN ON GROUNDS THAT
TRANSPORTATION DIFFICULT OR IMPOSSIBLE, BUT WITH
APPROACH OF SUMMER THIS RATIONALE BECAME UNTENABLE.
8. EMBASSY BELIEVES RETALIATION FOR CASES NOTED PARAS
3 AND 4 NEITHER ADVISABLE NOR POSSIBLE. EMBASSY
APPRECIATES DEPARTMENT'S SWIFT RESPONSE IN RETALIATING
FOR KARAGANDA, UST-KUT AND NIZHNENAGARSK TURNDOWNS (REF
E), AND URGES SIMILAR ACTION IN REMAINING CASES. TOON

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